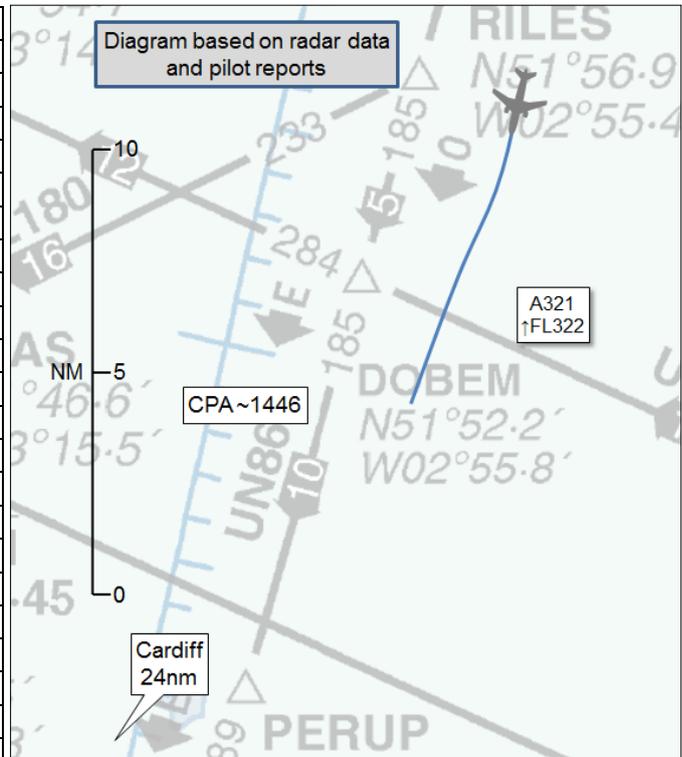


AIRPROX REPORT No 2016183

Date: 25 Aug 2016 Time: 1446Z Position: 5150N 00252W Location: 31nm NE Cardiff Airport

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	A321	Balloon
Operator	CAT	Unknown
Airspace	London UIR	London UIR
Class	C	C
Rules	IFR	
Service	Radar Control	
Provider	Swanwick	
Altitude/FL	FL330	
Transponder	A, C, S	
Reported		Not reported
Colours	Company	
Lighting	All on	
Conditions	VMC	
Visibility	15km	
Altitude/FL	FL330	
Heading	195°	
Speed	400kt	
ACAS/TAS	TCAS II	
Alert	None	
Separation		
Reported	0ft V/500m H	
Recorded	NK	



THE A321 PILOT reports being in level cruise when he saw a red blimp-shaped balloon, co-altitude at an estimated range of 5km and to the right of the nose. TCAS was checked and did not show a contact which correlated with the balloon. It was apparent that separation existed so no avoiding action was taken and the balloon passed down the right side. The occurrence was reported to ATC.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'Medium'.

THE BALLOON OPERATOR could not be traced.

THE SWANWICK LOWER AIRSPACE SERVICE WEST CONTROLLER reports that the Cardiff Airport Tower Assistant called at about 1425 to advise that a large '30ft' red balloon had 'come loose from Cardiff city centre' and was last seen passing 400ft into cloud. This information was passed to the sector teams and the Swanwick Mil Supervisor. At 1446, an A321 pilot reported seeing the balloon at 2nm off his right hand side while passing FL322 at PERUP. The Tactical controller then stopped off other traffic and passed Traffic Information on the balloon to two other aircraft in the vicinity. The A321 pilot reported the wind at that level to be 208° at 71kts.

THE SWANWICK TACTICAL CONTROLLER reports that on handover into position at about 1430 it was mentioned that a balloon had been inadvertently released in the Cardiff area but was believed to be only 8-10000ft above the ground so no reports were issued. The A321 pilot had been transferred from another agency and given a climb to FL330. As the aircraft passed FL322 the pilot reported he had had a report from the Swanwick Distress and Diversion Cell of the balloon and that it was visual at their level, FL322, and off to their right side at approximately 2nm. The pilot also gave a wind report which agreed with the reported winds and indicated the balloon would be tracking to the northeast. The controller immediately stopped another aircraft off at FL290, which was tracking into the reported area, and also gave Traffic Information to an aircraft at FL330 travelling northbound into the same

area. Traffic information was also passed to other relevant aircraft for a period after the A321 pilot's report. There were no further reported sightings from other aircraft.

Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

Article 92(5) of the ANO 2016 states:

'A balloon in captive flight must be securely moored and must not be left unattended unless it is fitted with a device which ensures its automatic deflation if it breaks free of its moorings.'

It was reported to UKAB that the balloon was being used as an advertising platform in Cardiff and that it had broken its tether. The Secretariat were unable to establish contact with the balloon operator.

Summary

An Airprox was reported when an A321 and a balloon flew into proximity at about 1448 on Thursday 25th August 2016. The A321 pilot was operating under IFR in VMC in receipt of a Radar Control Service from Swanwick. The balloon operator could not be traced.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of a report from the A321 pilot and radar photographs/video recordings.

Members agreed that it was regrettable the balloon operator could not be contacted in order to provide valuable information covering the mitigations in place against inadvertent release. Members noted the ANO regulation and opined that it would be desirable for a balloon to be fitted with such a device regardless of whether it was 'attended' or not. In the event, the A321 pilot saw the balloon at range and was able to assess that separation existed; some members felt that the A321 pilot would have been justified in altering his course to the left in order to increase separation. It was agreed that in this case there had been a conflict in Class C airspace but that the reported separation was such that there had not been a risk of collision.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: A conflict in Class C airspace.

Degree of Risk: C.